

Chief James Clement Varn House
Northeast corner of intersection of
U. S. Route 76 and State Route 225
Spring Place
Murray County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-174

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An Addendum to
Varn House
Spring Place, Georgia
in HABS Catalog (1941)

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

THE VANN HOUSE

Spring Place, Murray County, Georgia

Owner: DR. J. E. BRADFELDDate of Erection: Late in 18th centuryPresent Condition: PoorNumber of Stories: Two and attic over low basementMaterials of Construction: Foundation brick, wood floors, brick exterior walls, wood shingle roof.Other Existing Records: Records by P. Thornton Marye,

District Officer HABS 1934. Georgia's Landmarks,

Memorials and Legends, ^{vol. I, p. 62} by Knight. Annals, by Ramsey.Additional Data: One story porch with similar second story porch above, ^{FRONT + REAR} Gable roof. Kitchen in rear wing.

Floating stair. Probably the second home built on this site by Chief Vann. A tablet placed on the house 1915 by the Gov. John Milledge Chapter D A R ; Dalton, Ga. has the following inscription: "This tablet marks the residence of Joseph Vann, a Chief of the Cherokee Indians. Built late in the 18th century. John Howard Payne, illustrious author of "Home, Sweet Home" suspected of sedition, was brought to this house, examined and exonerated by the Georgia authorities. Near here stood the first Moravian Mission of the Cherokees." (1801)

Harold Bush-Brown
HAROLD BUSH-BROWN Dec 19, 1936
DISTRICT OFFICER-HABS

T.W.

CHIEF JAMES CLEMENT VANN HOUSE

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Location: Northeast corner of intersection of U. S. Route 76
and State Route 225, Spring Place, Murray County,
Georgia

Present Owner: The Georgia Historical Commission

Present Use: Historic House Museum

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. The following account of the Vann family and the history of the house is quoted from a leaflet entitled the Chief Vann House, published by the Georgia Historical Commission, Atlanta, Georgia, after 1958:

"Clement Vann, [a] Scottish trader, settled among the Cherokees early in the 18th century, [and] . . . married a full blood[ed] Cherokee woman who bore him several children. One was James Vann, builder of the Chief Vann House. . . . James Vann . . . gave them [the Moravians] land and helped them build . . . houses, then moved them across the road, taking their chosen site, first for his mother and later for himself. In 1802 one of the brethren wrote, 'Mr. Vann is planning a still by the spring near the mission house, and a home for himself on the exact hill where Brother Steiner had thought to build.'

". . . . James Vann wished to leave his vast holdings to his teen age son, Joseph Vann, but the Council of Chiefs intervened to divide the property equally between his widow and all of his children. Nevertheless, Joseph Vann acquired the Vann House and most of the property given to him and his mother. He was an even better businessman than his father, soon becoming known as 'Rich Joe' Vann by whites and Indians alike.

"Ambitious white men sought for years for some excuse to seize Vann's properties. Finally, he made the mistake of hiring a white man as overseer of his plantation, unintentionally violating a new Georgia law making it illegal for a white man to work for an Indian. The commander of the Georgia Guard sought to take over the house but a white boarder claimed it as his. A battle resulted with the Vann family huddled on the third floor and the defender on the second floor. The guardsmen finally smoked out the defender by building a fire on the stairway. The charred flooring is still visible.

"The Federal Government paid Joseph Vann \$19,605.00 for his fine brick house, 800 acres of cultivated land, 42 cabins, six barns, five smokehouses, a grist mill, a saw mill, blacksmith shop, 8 corn cribs, a shop and foundry, a trading post, peach kiln, a still, 1,133 peach trees, 147 apple trees, and other property.

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"Turned out of their home . . . Joe Vann and his family made their way to a farm he owned in Tennessee. Later they traveled to Weber Falls, Oklahoma where he built a duplicate of the Georgia Vann House. That house was destroyed by Federal forces during the War Between the States.

"Vann, operating a steamship line, met his death in the explosion of an overheated boiler on his flagship, the Lucy Walker, during a race with another steamboat on the Ohio River near Louisville, Kentucky, in October, 1844.

"The . . . Vann House deteriorated for 150 years despite the protests of national historians. Finally, an aroused community bought the house and three acres of land and gave them to the Georgia Historical Commission. The roof was entirely gone; the dining room floor had collapsed; the brick arches over the doors were cracked and falling in. Every windowpane was shattered by vandals.

"Over a period of several years the Commission with the untiring aid of the Murray-Whitfield County Historical Society and its president, Mrs. B. J. Bandy of Dalton, restored the building and partially furnished it. Scalamandre, Inc., of New York gave the material for the elaborate period draperies. Finally, the house was dedicated in July, 1958, before a distinguished gathering of leaders of the Cherokees, 42 descendants of the Vann family, and interested Georgians. Many priceless relics of the family were returned to the house as exhibits.

"The restoration architect was Dr. Henry Chandlee Forman, of Easton, Maryland. Leonard & Ingle, of Chatsworth, were the contractors.

"The Chief Vann House is operated by the Commission as a historic shrine. There is a small admission fee for maintenance.

"C. E. Gregory, Consultant and former
Executive Secretary"

B. Supplementary Sources of Information:

"Chief Vann House," Architects' Report (Chesapeake Bay Region), Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring, 1961). Baltimore: Baltimore Chapter AIA, p. 3.

Leckie, George G. (ed.). Georgia, A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside. American Guide Series. Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1954.

Nichols, Frederick Doveton, and Johnston, Frances Benjamin. The Early Architecture of Georgia. Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Chief Vann House is highly regarded by many nationally known architectural historians. One of two early brick houses--unusual for the area and period--built on Cherokee land in northern Georgia, it has both Georgian and early Republican features.
2. Condition of fabric: Although the structure had been allowed to deteriorate in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, the building was restored in 1958 and now is cared for as a historical house museum.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories; three-bay front, two bay sides; rectangular shape.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall construction: Brick laid in common bond; molded brick water table; decorative front and rear elevation, simple pilaster strips.
4. Structural system: Brick bearing walls and wood framing.
5. Porches:
 - a. North (front) porch: One-bay, two-story, pedimented wooden porch with simple, grouped, square columns on plinths.
 - b. South (rear) porch: Three bays of irregular widths; two-story, pedimented, wooden porch with simple, grouped, square columns on plinths.
6. Chimneys: Two brick exterior end chimneys laid in common bond.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: First floor--"A true Palladian doorway [in front and rear elevations] in rather an awkward form was used at the Vann house. Here the semicircular fan [twelve lights] and the rectangular sidelights [five lights in each] are organized into one large semicircular design with the use of a panelled fan." Nichols and Johnston, The Early

Architecture of Georgia (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957), p. 133.
Second floor--The same form simplified.

b. Windows: Twelve-over-twelve light wooden sash.

8. Roof: Gable roof; pulvinated frieze and modillion cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Symmetric central-hall plan, one room at each side.
2. Stairways: "An early and unusual stair is to be seen at the Vann house. It is a highly provincial rendering with a walnut rail and straight balusters. It is unique in that it ascends to the attic at right angles to the ramps rising from the first floor." Nichols and Johnston, The Early Architecture of Georgia, p. 138.
3. Flooring: Random-width boarding.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: "The interiors of the Vann house indicate the transition from Georgian to Early Republican design with characteristic panelled dadoes below plaster walls and movable panels under the windows. The panelled overmantels have unusual compositions with colonnettes on center. The ornament is in the thin, flat manner of the Adam brothers." Nichols and Johnston, The Early Architecture of Georgia, p. 137.
5. Doorways and doors: Molded wooden frames with panelled reveals; six-panel wooden doors (three-panel double doors to exterior).
6. Heating: Open-hearth brick fireplace in each room.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
March 1964